

Memorandum

To: Sheldon Gen
From: Robert Sarmiento
Date: 5/7/2008
Re: Analysis of San Francisco's Transit-First Policy

San Francisco's Transit-First Policy is focused on prioritizing public transportation improvements over improvements in vehicular traffic. The Transit-First Policy was adopted in response to the Department of Highways (now CalTrans) proposed Trafficways Plan. After protest from a coalition and the San Francisco Chronicle in the "Freeway Revolt," in 1973, the Board of Supervisors and the City's Planning Department approved the Transit First Policy, which was formulated by SPUR. The policy has resulted in prioritization and construction of public transit projects; in addition, no freeways have been built since the policy was adopted. The policy has been modified to be more multi-modal, with added provisions for pedestrians and bicycle traffic.

San Francisco's Transit-First Policy has had a number of stakeholders through its lifetime. Interest groups, various governmental agencies, and residents of San Francisco have all been involved in the policy process, and continue to influence the Transit-First Policy.

The Transit-First Policy displays various policy models. Different theories of the policy process, such as the Systems Model and the Punctuated Equilibrium Model, are apparent in the policy process of the Transit-First Policy. In addition, different theories of power and decision-making can be seen in the formulation, adoption, and implementation of this policy.

The Transit-First Policy continues to be an influential policy on transportation projects and the future of transportation planning in San Francisco. It has been evaluated as being effective, and though some interest groups are working to move the City away from adhering to the Transit-First Policy, the City's preference for an effective public transportation system and the political climate will ensure that the principles of the Transit-First Policy will continue to be implemented.

Introduction

Transportation systems are essential to a vital functioning city. Transportation systems move people from other cities and regions to the city, and move people around in the city itself. An issue in many cities is how to effectively move a diverse group of people while maintaining a high-quality place to live and work. Poorly-planned and inadequate transportation systems degrade the quality of life in cities. Though automobile travel is the preferred mode of transportation in the United States today, it is widely known that the automobile as a mode of transportation contributes to a number of detrimental effects, such as sprawl, air pollution, an increased reliance on gasoline and other fossil fuels, and increased economic hardship. Alternative modes of transportation, such as buses, light-rail, subway trains, heavy rail, bikes, ferries, and walking, mitigate some of the detrimental effects caused by automobile use, while offering their own benefits as a transportation system.

The City of San Francisco is a major metropolitan area in the San Francisco Bay Area. It needs an efficient transportation system to bring people living throughout the Bay Area into San Francisco and to move people around the City. Many physical and environmental factors add to the complexity of creating a comprehensive transportation system in San Francisco; this includes the San Francisco Bay, hills, seismic activity, and preservation of air quality, but these factors also push for innovative ideas to create an effective transportation system. In addition, the City has always valued and maintained a high quality of living; therefore, the City must design and implement a transportation system that does not disrupt the high quality of living. Since automobile use contributes to degradation to the quality of living the City values, the City must promote other modes

of transportation. These other modes of transportation must be efficient to make them attractive as an alternative to driving an automobile. The City has taken the step of creating a Transit-First Policy, which prioritizes transit efficiency and improvements over vehicle efficiency.

Transit-First Policy

San Francisco's current Transit-First Policy is below:

The following principles shall constitute the City and County's transit-first policy and shall be incorporated into the General Plan of the City and County. All officers, boards, commissions, and departments shall implement these principles in conducting the City and County's affairs:

- 1. To ensure quality of life and economic health in San Francisco, the primary objective of the transportation system must be the safe and efficient movement of people and goods.*
- 2. Public transit, including taxis and vanpools, is an economically and environmentally sound alternative to transportation by individual automobiles. Within San Francisco, travel by public transit, by bicycle and on foot must be an attractive alternative to travel by private automobile.*
- 3. Decisions regarding the use of limited public street and sidewalk space shall encourage the use of public rights of way by pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit, and shall strive to reduce traffic and improve public health and safety.*
- 4. Transit priority improvements, such as designated transit lanes and streets and improved signalization, shall be made to expedite the movement of public transit vehicles (including taxis and vanpools) and to improve pedestrian safety.*
- 5. Pedestrian areas shall be enhanced wherever possible to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrians and to encourage travel by foot.*
- 6. Bicycling shall be promoted by encouraging safe streets for riding, convenient access to transit, bicycle lanes, and secure bicycle parking.*
- 7. Parking policies for areas well served by public transit shall be designed to encourage travel by public transit and alternative transportation.*
- 8. New transportation investment should be allocated to meet the demand for public transit generated by new public and private commercial and residential developments.*

9. The ability of the City and County to reduce traffic congestion depends on the adequacy of regional public transportation. The City and County shall promote the use of regional mass transit and the continued development of an integrated, reliable, regional public transportation system.

10. The City and County shall encourage innovative solutions to meet public transportation needs wherever possible and where the provision of such service will not adversely affect the service provided by the Municipal Railway.

(City and County of San Francisco, n.d.)

History

The City's Transit-First Policy was created as a response to the City's intention to make the City more automobile-oriented. Originally a transit-friendly city, San Francisco became more automobile-oriented in the middle of the 20th Century, first with the opening of the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge, then with the decentralization of San Francisco and the Bay Area itself. To move automobiles around San Francisco, the Department of Highways, now CalTrans, proposed the 1953 Trafficways Plan, which proposed a network of freeways crisscrossing San Francisco (Carlsson, n.d.). This was met with opposition from, at first, a coalition made up of members of the "Freeway Revolt," who criticized the plan as detrimental to the City's livability and character (Carlsson, n.d.). This coalition and the San Francisco Chronicle, who wrote an influential article denouncing the freeway network, encouraged both residents and politicians to oppose the network of freeways (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 1999). The proposed freeways were never built, and freeways already in construction, such as the Embarcadero Freeway and Central Freeway, were halted in mid-construction. Soon after, public transportation projects made the City more transit-friendly. In 1970, ferry service, a major transportation mode in San Francisco, was reintroduced. In 1972, BART was introduced in San Francisco, and in 1974, connected to the East Bay via the

Transbay tube. In 1979, MUNI upgraded its MUNI Metro service. And in 1980, Caltrain was created (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 1999).

These public transportation projects became associated with the passing of the City's Transit-First Policy. In the early 1970's, the organization San Francisco Planning and Urban Research (SPUR), a citizen planning organization, analyzed MUNI operations and found it to be lacking, and recommended a set of policies to make MUNI more efficient. In addition, more importantly, the recommendations also include a policy called the Transit-First Policy to make the public transit efficiency the City's priority over car use (SPUR Transportation Committee, 1999). The Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission were particularly fond of this policy, since residents had been against building more freeways to accommodate vehicles for over a decade. In 1973, the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission adopted the Transit-First Policy, giving top priority to public transit investments as the centerpiece of the city's transportation policy and adopting street capacity and parking policies to discourage increases in automobile traffic (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 1999). In 2000, the policy was modified to encourage multi-modalism, including bicycling and walking, rather than the use of the single-occupant vehicle (Fleck, Jack, Mirabdol, Javad, & Yee, Bond, n.d.).

Policy Cycle

The agenda setting phase of the policy cycle in this case was when decentralization of San Francisco and the Bay Area occurred, and the automobile became the dominant form of transportation. To ease congestion and accommodate vehicular traffic, a freeway network was proposed in San Francisco. This caused opposition from

members of the Freeway Revolt, who wanted to preserve the City's character and livability. The Freeway Revolt caught the attention of first the media, and then the Local Government, who sided with members of the Freeway Revolt, and subsequently, the Board of Supervisors began incrementally rejecting freeway construction throughout the City. The agenda setting phase occurred from the early 1950's, when the Trafficways Plan was proposed, up to the late 1960's, when the Board of Supervisors rejected the Trafficways Plan almost entirely (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 1999). The policy formulation stage was when the organization SPUR came up with a number of principles to prioritize public transit use in the City in their report on how to make MUNI a better transportation system. This occurred from 1970 through 1973 (SPUR Transportation Committee, 1999). In 1973, the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission, supportive of SPUR's Transit-First Policy proposal, approved the Transit-First Policy (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 1999). This was the policy adoption phase of the policy process. Soon, implementation phase of the policy process was apparent as a number of transportation projects that provided an alternative to driving were completed, such as BART and ferry service, and improvements to MUNI service, including new lines, a new subway, and better service on existing lines (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 1999). The implementation phase has been ongoing since the 1970's till today, which is where the policy currently stands. The Transit-First Policy has also been evaluated during this time period as successful. Growth in commuter traffic to and from Downtown has been accommodated by public transportation only and by no new freeways. It also has been evaluated as being successful in maintaining cleaner air and stabilizing traffic congestion

the City. The Transit-First Policy has also been successful in complying with provisions of the State's Clean Air Act, exempting the City from State regulations. In fact, in 1993, a survey of automobile and transit use done on various cities in California showed that San Francisco was in compliance with standards mandated by the Air Quality District for 1999, which therefore showed that the Transit-First policy was successful in reducing car use and creating a more livable and cleaner environment (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 1999). The Transit-First Policy was altered in 2000 to include more alternative modes of transportation, namely, walking and bicycling, into the policy and to design transportation systems in the City that accommodate these other modes.

Stakeholders

A variety of stakeholders were involved in the policy process that resulted in the adoption of the Transit-First Policy, and continue to be involved in the implementation, evaluation, and changing of the Transit-First policy. The stakeholders are the Board of Supervisors and the San Francisco Planning Department, collectively called the Local Government, CalTrans, other governmental agencies, SPUR, members of the "Freeway Revolt," the media, and residents of San Francisco. The Local Government is a formal stakeholder who is involved in many parts of the policy process. They have the power to affect the agenda setting; in this case, they protested and eventually rejected the Trafficways Plan of 1953, which focused the future of transportation systems away from freeway construction because of the loss of livability and character in the City and towards an alternative. The Local Government, being a formal player, was influential in the policy adoption phase, as they, approved the Transit-First Policy in 1973.

CalTrans is another formal player involved in the policy process which eventually resulted in the adoption of the Transit-First Policy. CalTrans's mission is to move traffic efficiently along State and Federal Highways. CalTrans surmised that people driving cars could easily move around San Francisco if a network of freeways were built in the City, so they proposed a network of freeways which was called the Trafficways Plan of 1953, and urged its approval, which was however ultimately denied by the Board of Supervisors. Caltrans was influential in the agenda setting stage.

Other government agencies were influential on the policy process regarding the Transit-First Policy. The State of CA has influence over the policy process. The State's Air Resources Board sponsored the Clean Air Act bill which was adopted by the Governor. The Clean Air Act clearly spelled out in statute California's air quality goals, planning mechanisms, regulatory strategies, and standards of progress (Olberg, 2003). Since this Act was adopted after the adoption of the Transit-First Policy, the Policy had to be evaluated to determine if it resulted in the City being in compliance with the principles of the Clean Air Act, and if it wasn't, what changes were needed. The Transit-First Policy was actually successful in keeping the City complaint. The Air Resources Board was influential in the policy evaluation phase.

A number of informal stakeholders affected the policy process. One main informal stakeholder was San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal, or SPUR. A think tank offers a useful forum where academics, scholars, former government officials, and other experts can collaborate and pursue research, with potentially dramatic policy implications, by focusing attention towards new and possibly better directions in public policy, and SPUR, as a think tank, contains a number of advocates, former and present

local government officials, and experts in the field of planning whose collective goal was to promote good planning practices in San Francisco (Theodoulou & Kofinis, 2004).

When making a report to on how to make MUNI a better transit system, SPUR proposed a number of policies to make public transit a priority in the City, collectively called Transit-First. According to one member of SPUR, the Transit-First Policy was in response specifically to the City's Department of Public Works, which had always made traffic and street policies that favored the automobile over public transit (Paul, 1999). SPUR's formulated policies caught the attention of the Local Government, who after rejecting freeway growth in the City, were looking for an alternative to move people around the City. SPUR was influential in the policy formulation phase of the process.

The other main informal stakeholder that was influential in the Transit-First Policy was the coalition that opposed the freeway network. With a great affection for San Francisco's character, this coalition knew the detrimental effects of adding a freeway network and protested the Trafficways Plan. Their protests initially brought attention to the issue. This coalition was influential in the agenda-setting phase.

The media was another stakeholder in the process. In this particular process, the San Francisco Chronicle was the stakeholder who affected the agenda-setting phase of the process. The newspaper company printed an article that opposed the Trafficways Plan and brought attention of the negative effects of a freeway network on the City to a broader audience, namely both residents and the Local Government. The newspaper's article was effective in influencing both groups to oppose the freeway network, with the Board of Supervisors eventually rejecting the Trafficways Plan. The San Francisco Chronicle's influence on the agenda-setting phase was exactly as Linsky said it would.

Linsky said, “The press plays a contributing role in setting the policy agenda. In fact, the media has little effect on changing people’s opinions on issues, but has a large effect on what issues people think about via its coverage. The obvious conclusion is that if the public is intently focused on a policy issue, the federal government has little choice but to put it on the policy agenda” (Leroi, 2007).

Finally, residents of San Francisco were stakeholders in the policy process. They were involved in the agenda setting phase. Once the coalition behind the Freeway Revolt brought forth the negative effects of a freeway network, residents became aware of the issue and also began to call for an end to a freeway network. This made the issue even bigger as now not just an interest group but residents as a whole were against the Trafficways Plan. This influenced the Local Government to reject the Trafficways Plan and find alternatives to vehicle use.

Policy Process Models

The Transit-First Policy contains a number of policy processes. The first policy process involved with the Transit-First Policy is the Systems Model. The Systems Model is characterized by the environment placing demands for a response, and policymakers approve policies that respond to the environmental demands. These policies produce new demands that cause the cycle to continually repeat. In the case of the Transit-First Policy, City Government responded to demands from informal players and the preservation of the City’s character and livability by first halting freeway construction and then passing the Transit-First Policy. New environmental factors such as State legislation and the influence of interest groups have swayed the Local Government to continually analyze the policy, and make the appropriate changes or additions in response to the demand.

Second, the Transit-First Policy is also an example of the Punctuated Equilibrium Model. The Punctuated Equilibrium Model is characterized by stable and incremental policy-making by both institutional and informal players. However, if the situation arises, a spike in policy-making activity can result in major changes to the status quo or a deviation from stable and incremental policy-making. In the case of the history of the Transit-First Policy, incremental changes were originally being made to the transportation system of San Francisco to accommodate vehicles since that were the prevalent mode of transportation across the Bay Area and the United States, and other cities and regions were modifying their policies to accommodate them. The Trafficways Plan was a comprehensive plan that would collectively explain all the incremental changes that would take place in the City. However, dissatisfaction with this plan and the negative effects on the character and livability of the City caused protesters to form a coalition to stop freeway expansion into the City. Their increasing displeasure with the plan caught the attention of the media, residents of San Francisco, and the Local Government, which pushed the issue of freeways up the agenda. Eventually, this push changed the voting tendencies of the Board of Supervisors, which rejected particular freeways and eventually the whole Trafficways Plan. Eventually, the Local Government passed the Transit-First Policy, and seeing that it has been effective in maintaining a high quality of life, have not made major changes to the policy, only incremental changes to tweak the policy and add more modes of transportation, such as bicycles and walking, to further discourage the use of automobiles in the City.

The Transit-First Policy has a number of sources of power for the various players involved. The first kind of power the players display in the policy process is Group

Theory. Group Theory is characterized by individuals with little power coming together to form an interest group, which collectively increases their power. According to Pagan, refuting Garson's claim, group theories have a significant influence on the policy process (2007). This can be seen in the agenda-setting phase of the Transit-First Policy.

Members of the Freeway Revolt made up a coalition that showed their significant power in their ability to sway the Board of Supervisors into rejecting freeway expansion and favoring public transit. Also, SPUR's influence is also an example of Group Theory. SPUR is an organization made up of concerned citizens, advocates, experts in planning, and members of the private industry concerned with good planning practices. Separately, these individuals do not have much influence, but collectively, they can exert much influence, especially because of the diversity of backgrounds and knowledge SPUR members have. The organization showed significant influence, as it was able to formulate the policy itself and convince the Local Government to adopt the policy.

Another theory of power in the Transit-First Policy process is the Advocacy Coalition Framework. This model is characterized by coalitions battling one another to alter policy to fit their preferences, while policy brokers work out compromises with different coalitions when formulating and adopting policy. The main struggle was between SPUR and the Department of Public Works. SPUR advocated transit priority, while the Department of Public Works advocated designing streets for vehicular traffic. In this case, the Board of Supervisors, power brokers, voted in favor of SPUR's beliefs, and the Transit-First Policy was adopted. Currently, rival coalitions are clashing over whether the City should focus their policies on transit or vehicular capacity improvements. This was reflective in the recent local election, where transit advocacy

groups supported Proposition A, which was for MUNI improvements, while car advocacy groups supported Proposition H, which called for higher parking requirements to accommodate more cars. According to Carmen Arambula, “(Advocacy groups) seek to manipulate the rules, budgets, and personnel of governmental institutions in order to achieve these goals over time” (2007). In the case of the latest propositions, it is apparent that these coalitions are trying to influence voters to support their values regarding the future of transportation systems in San Francisco. Whether or not these propositions get approved won’t directly affect the Transit-First Policy because the policy process is incremental, but it will be a step in a specific direction for the future of the City’s transportation systems, which could possibly affect the Transit-First Policy in the future.

Prognosis

Currently, the Transit-First Policy is in the policy implementation and evaluation stage. The policy was adopted in 1973, and now implementation has been taking place from that time until the present. This is reflected in the kind of transportation projects that have been implemented since 1973. BART, MUNI expansion, and CalTrans have all been completed since the adoption of the Transit-First Policy. In addition, no new freeways have been constructed. The major event that showcased the Transit-First Policy was the demolition of the Embarcadero Freeway. After the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, the Embarcadero Freeway was heavily damaged, and after a big debate over what to do with the freeway, the Board of Supervisors decided not to rebuild the freeway, but instead, approved the creation a more beautiful bayside boulevard, with ample right-of-ways for public transit (F-Line), bicycles, and pedestrians (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 1999; Fleck, Jack, Mirabdal, Javad, & Yee, Bond, n.d.).

In addition, the City approved the construction of a MUNI Metro extension to Chinatown as a replacement to the freeway. This showed the commitment of the City to the principles of the Transit-First Policy, namely, the promotion and use of public transit, and refusing to build transportation projects, in this case, the replacement of an elevated freeway.

The Transit-First Policy is constantly being evaluated for its effectiveness, especially at this time where the Bay Area and the nation in general debate over the future of transportation systems. Some groups believe in the value of public transportation, and because of San Francisco's unique character and topography, they believe that the City's Transit-First Policy should be continued. Others, who view increasing vehicular use as inevitable, believe that future transportation system improvements should focus on improving vehicular traffic. This group believes that the Transit-First Policy is ineffective in dealing long-term with future transportation issues. They want to slowly make changes towards making the City more accommodating to vehicles. This was evident in this past election, where a proposition was put on the ballot for more parking for vehicles by interest groups in favor of accommodating vehicles. These differing beliefs highlight the problem with the effectiveness of the Transit-First Policy; namely, it is difficult to evaluate its effectiveness. On the one hand, the City has proposed and adopted a number of projects that conform to the principles of the Transit-First Policy. However, in spite of these projects, traffic continues to be a problem in the City as many people still drive. Since it is difficult in truly evaluating the success of the policy, there will continue to be a debate over whether the Transit-First Policy is really that effective (Theodoulou & Kofinis, 2004).

I believe the City's Transit-First Policy will continue to be implemented for the foreseeable future. San Francisco has a unique political climate, where residents are very protective of the City's character and livability, so when transportation projects are approved, they want projects, such as freeways that do not hurt the City's character and livability, but rather ones that preserve the character and livability, such as public transit improvements, multi-modal improvements, and other projects that improve the beauty of the City, such as the attractive Embarcadero and the use of historic streetcars. However, as mentioned, some coalitions are campaigning to have their ideals implemented, such as more parking spaces. I think if these ideals are implemented, it could slowly erode the use of the Transit-First Policy, especially if these ideals are shown to be effective. In addition, though the policy favoring transit priority had been implemented, the actual transportation system's efficiency has been less than ideal. It is widely known that MUNI is not the most timely public transportation system, and commuters' continued disgust with MUNI can change their mindset to one that prefers policies that improve vehicular mobility. However, I still believe that the Transit-First Policy will continue to be implemented by the City as residents still believe that efficient public transportation and other non-driving modes are the ideal way to travel around the City. As mentioned in the Art of the Game, "Such public and political support can motivate administrative actors to ensure that the policy is successfully implemented" (Theodoulou & Kofinis, 2004).

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